DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 470 720 CG 032 062

AUTHOR	Jackson, Valery L.
TITLE	Mentoring and Co-Mentoring: Vehicles To Teach Tolerance in the New Millennium?
PUB DATE	2002-00-00
NOTE	18p.
PUB TYPE	Information Analyses (070)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Cultural Pluralism; *Mentors; Public Schools; *Secondary Education; *Self Concept; *Student Development

ABSTRACT

Mentoring and co-mentoring have gained a firm base in the educational jargon of the new millennium. Many teachers use these concepts each day with students, peer teachers, parents, and administrators. In fact, the term teacher, in some cases, is now becoming synonymous with the word mentor. Yet there remains a lack of clarity about the overall goal of mentoring. The author of this paper suggests that mentoring may be used as a tool for the educator to communicate the concepts of self-awareness and diversity for United States citizens. Through this awareness, tolerance for others who are different might be attained. (Contains 25 references.) (Author/GCP)

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Mentoring and Co-Mentoring: Vehicles to teach tolerance in the new millennium?

Harris County High School

Valery L. Jackson

Doctoral Student in Educational Leadership

Auburn University

English Instructor

Harris County High School

8281 Highway 116

Hamilton, Georgia 31811

Office Phone: (706) 628-4278

Office Fax: (706) 628-4335

Home Phone: (706) 645-5664

Email: valeryjackson@charter.net

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Abstract

Mentoring and Co-mentoring have gained a firm base in the educational jargon of the new millennium. Many teachers use these concepts each day with students, peer teachers, parents, and administrators. In fact, the term teacher, in some cases, is now becoming synonymous with the word mentor. Yet, there remains a lack of clarity about the overall goal of mentoring. The author of this paper suggests that mentoring may be used as a tool for the educator to communicate the concepts self-awareness and diversity for United States citizens. Through this awareness, tolerance for others who are different might be attained.

The conceptualization of diversity for the American secondary school educator necessarily presents a challenge for the next century because differences will, ultimately, yearn to be addressed. Diversity has been and will become an even increasingly hot issue for the next century. Although the term diversity is currently used to designate many social ideas/groups as exceptional outside the mainstream, the concept of diversity can theoretically be defined in such a broad way that categorical designations become almost impossible to achieve.

Important social and political issues of race present a constant dilemma for blacks, Latinos, Native Americans, biracial, multiracial individuals, and others. Voices requesting special consideration because of this type of diversity remain strong. Yet, other elements of diversity like language, poverty, gender, class, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, and etc. are, also, fluctuating and gaining strength in the political and social landscape. The process(es) of responding to those varied, inquiring voices may require the individual secondary educator to consider totally different ways of being and doing.

Mentoring and Co-Mentoring: Vehicles to teach tolerance in the new millennium?

When you set out for Ithaca,
pray that your road's a long one,
full of adventure, full of discovery...

Keep Ithaca always in mind.
Arriving there is what you're destined for.
But don't hurry the journey at all.
Better if it goes on for years
so you're old by the time you reach the island,
wealthy with all you've gained on the way,
not expecting Ithaca to make you rich.
Ithaca gave you the marvelous journey.
Without her you wouldn't have set out...

-"Ithaca," C.P. Cavafy (Goldenberg, Bosson, Hoyt, Kolar, & Tougan, 1997)

A parallel can be made between the classical, epic account of Odysseus' heroic search for Ithaca and the modern educator's journey to obtain professional competence. In Homer's legendary epic poem, The Odyssey, Ithaca was Odysseus' ultimate destination, his homeland. He knew that once he arrived, everything would be as he wanted. He would be king of Ithaca. He would be reunited with his wife, Penelope, and their son, Telemachus. In a similar fashion, contemporary educators undergo their own type of perilous journey in which they seek to obtain proficiency as teachers. Like Odysseus, each individual educator encounters diverse obstacles along the way to his/her goal, and must, ultimately, rely on his/her wits and the help of those around him/her to complete the arduous task. Additionally, like the various characters from the Greek epic, not all persons who make the attempt are able to obtain the ultimate prize.

Obviously, when involved in a large undertaking, most people recognize the value of assistance from others. Odysseus had his crew and the help of several gods when circumstances became difficult. Sometimes they had to count on each other for help. Teachers, too, can elicit the help of their peers and the administrative team when they meet their obstacles. These helping people can be viewed as mentors helping another, the mentee (protégé). The process utilized to help another accomplish his/her task is called

mentoring (Knackstedt, 1999). The process used when two workers in a similar position work together to accomplish a goal called co-mentoring (Mullen, Cox, Boettcher, & Adoue, 1997).

Currently, most existing research on mentoring explores its comparative value when implemented from the traditional top down perspective. As an illustration of this generally accepted methodology, most mentors are seen as experienced, knowledgeable people who are wise enough to impart information to those who do not know as much without damaging the mentee's ego during the process. Typically, the mentee is shown the proverbial tricks of the trade and, thereby, gains the skills necessary to become a competent worker. This mentoring process has been used quite effectively in the educational community. It typical use appears designed to enable the less experienced individual to acquire the necessary information to be successful in a new position/level (Knackstedt, 1999).

During the last decade, mentoring has emerged as a powerful, socializing force that effects nearly all aspects of public school life. Although the concept of mentoring is certainly not original when one considers it from the historical perspective of Socrates and Plato, mentoring has become one of the latest catchwords in the field of education. Afterall, is seems, teachers are society's paid mentors for the youth of America (Evans, 2000). So, now that the process of mentoring has been officially labeled and recognized in educational jargon, it has become yet another tool for the educator. The ongoing challenge appears to be to figure out the best ways that tool can be used for the benefit of students.

Admittedly, not enough research has been done to document what impact mentoring is having on the teaching profession. In addition, the enthusiasm for this idea has not been matched with clarity about its purpose (Feiman-Nemser, 1998). There is an implied call for educators to collect data about the effect that mentoring is having within the public school setting. Indeed, there appears to be a need for education to clearly define its "Ithaca." In other words, educators are doing something. Yet, what are they doing? What is the big picture?

In the 1980s educational researchers picked up the business world's catch phrase of "mentoring" and started monitoring mentoring activities in teaching and school administration arenas. Recent educational publications of the 1990s have broadened the traditional conceptual paradigm of mentoring for educators (Mullen, Cox, Boettcher, & Adoue, 1997), and, consequently, new questions have emerged for the researcher's exploration. For example, could an effective mentor be a worker/peer who is functioning in a similar position in a current job? Of course, a co-mentor is what most public school teachers recognize as a peer coach. Could this peer teacher assist with the acquisition of meaningful growth and development for the teacher? Maybe he/she could. Peer coaching has been used in many evaluation instruments to assist with teacher supervision (Hungerford, 1997). Yet, has the research been completed?

Currently, most public school administrators have the function of supervising instruction. (In some states, the burden of this task is alleviated through the hiring of a person who works exclusively as a supervisor of instruction.) The principal is, ideally, supposed to promote teacher improvement through the entire evaluation process. The hard reality is that most principals can afford to spend very little of their time supervising to promote instructional improvement; rather, they are busy with the other evolving issues related to running a school.

When the administrators do, finally, find an opportunity to evaluate the staff, they generally focus on documenting and observing entering teachers and some see this process as an opportunity to get a young teacher on the right track. Interestingly, from the view of many citizens in the general population, the evaluation instrument is seen as the pathway to instruct teachers to become better at the process of teaching. In its practical application, however, it is the instrument used to legally verify an observer's perspective concerning an employee during a slice of time. In the case of the tenured teacher, the evaluation instrument enables the principal or other observer to document a perceived reality and enable effective due process procedures when they deal with teachers whom they consider ineffective and/or incompetent. Even more

interesting is the existence of laws within particular states (ex. Georgia) which allow a principal to dismiss an entering teacher with no explanation within the first three years.

In the State of Georgia this rather complicated evaluation process involves the utilization of an evaluation instrument that has been approved and adopted by the local school board. In the Harris County School District this recently developed, local, evaluation program involves multiple layers, differentiated tasks, and various choices as the teacher gains experience and, subsequently, progresses through the system. During the 1998-1999 school year, a peer-coaching evaluation component was universally applied to the Harris County High School faculty, in addition to the mandated use of the board-approved, standard evaluation instrument (Hungerford, 1997). Further research of sites like this one could reveal the impact of mentoring in the area of peer coaching.

The concept of mentoring and the catchword of mentoring used in public schools has been utilized and will continue be used in a multitude of formats (Toth, 1990) (Orland-Barak, 2001) (Ezarik, 2000) (Evans, 2000). In general, mentors are viewed as experienced, knowledgeable people who are wise enough to impart information to a mentee without damaging the mentee's ego during the process. Through mentoring, the mentee is shown the proverbial tricks of the trade and, thereby, gains the skills necessary to become a competent worker. Some mentoring advocates even go so far as to talk of co-mentoring relationships where the participants are considered equals who are striving toward a similar goal (Backes, 1992).

The mentoring process has been used quite effectively in the business community. Its typical use appears designed to enable the less experienced individual to acquire the necessary information to be successful in a new position/level. Recent educational research, however, has broadened the traditional conceptual paradigm of mentoring, and, consequently, new issues and circumstances have emerged for the researcher's exploration.

Almost everything a teacher does can be conceptualized as mentoring (Dondero, 1997). Therefore, teacher and mentor might appear to merge into one concept. However, one must be careful. A teacher is mentor. Yet, sometimes the mentoring relationship can take on a different one than the traditional top down perspective. Sometimes, co-mentoring occurs (Ambrose & Allen, 1994). Sometimes, the mentee actually assumes the mentoring function for the mentor (Harris County Youth Leadership, 2001). A mentor may not be a teacher at all (Backes, 1992). Obviously, being a teacher is only one part of the larger concept of mentor.

So, a mentor may not be the traditional, salaried teacher. Another example of this phenomenon of the mentor not being a paid teacher is demonstrated when members of the community devote their time and efforts to assist high school youth (Backes, 1992). Capitol recording artist Meredith Brooks started Anybody's Mentoring Program (AMP). The organization is designed to help students realize that many of the resources needed to succeed are at their fingertips. They just need to know how to access them. The National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences helps to book Ms. Brooks for high school speeches. She talks about how she wants to help kids like herself who grew up without the support they wanted. The idea for the program came from Meredith's own life experiences when she was a young, struggling artist (Newman & Bambarger, 1999). Of course, Mrs. Brooks' idea of adult outreach is not an original one. The process has been used by other role models around the country (Evens, 2000).

Interestingly, the adults in the community are often interested in the moral aspects involved in the training and the relaying of those ideas to youth. Some of these morals are honesty and integrity (Schwandt, 1998). In addition to moral concerns, it appears that the adults want to help ease the difficulty of transition from adolescence to adulthood through outreach programs of various types (Anderson, 2001) (Tice, 1996) (Plucker, 1998).

Researchers often report that student aspirations are related to educational outcomes. Some of those positive outcomes are academic performance, affective health, attrition, and leadership skills. A few have

even explored the impact of school climate and student aspirations. In 1998, Jonathan Plucker reported that school climate does impact student aspirations of inspiration and ambition. Furthermore, mentoring is one way of generating a better school climate (Plucker, 1998). Through a mentorship, adult mentors are given the opportunity to nurture a young person who could make a difference in a rapidly changing world. Many adults report that their role(s) as mentor makes them appreciate the positive impact they have had on another human being. As the mentorship evolves, they learn to enjoy the rewards of giving (Ambrose, 1994). Some mentorships, however, involve students who are relatively close in grade level. For example, the mentor relationship can be between an upperclassman and a lowerclassman. The older students often help the younger students with issues like personal problems, violence, failing grades, lack of information, and drug abuse (The National Media Outreach Center, 1991). Many public high schools have some form of a student to student mentoring program in place during this time in history (Toledo Public Schools, 1991) (Davalos & Haensly, 1997).

Maybe it is time to establish an overall goal for educational mentoring. Could it be that mentoring is actually the venue the educator can use to help a person realize the self within the context of the larger society? Furthermore, could it be used to teach tolerance of diversity?

Using the Mentoring Process to Promote the Conceptualization of Diversity for the Secondary School Educator

Diversity has been and will become an even increasingly hot issue for the next century in American public education. The word diverse is from the Latin word divertere. It literally means turned in opposite directions (Barnett, 2000). Its very connotative meaning, however, is debated when various groups begin to apply the term socially. Additionally, although the word is currently used to label/designate many social ideas/groups as significant and exceptional outside the mainstream, the concept of diversity can theoretically be defined in such a broad way that categorical designations might become almost impossible to achieve.

Important social and political issues of race present a constant dilemma for blacks, Latinos, Native Americans, biracial, multiracial individuals, and others. Voices requesting special consideration because of this type of diversity remain strong. Yet, other elements of diversity like language, poverty, gender, class, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, and etc. are, also, fluctuating and gaining strength in the political and social landscape. All want consideration. Admittedly, though, as the old saying goes, there are two sides to everything. So then, diversity involves more than just acknowledging the first voice one hears crying in the wilderness.

This multi-layering in the conceptualization of diversity necessarily presents a challenge for the next century in public education because fundamental differences will, ultimately, yearn to be addressed. The educational and social processes of responding to those varied, inquiring voices may require the individual educator to look at totally different ways of being and doing. Of course, this handling of diversity (maybe by walking a mile in another's shoes) could potentially be uncomfortable to some, especially if an educator likes the system as it currently exists. There is no doubt that most educators like the system as it is. However, a compelling question emerges. What can be done about the opinions of the others? In the next section of this paper, the author will attempt to make a case for establishing diversity and tolerance of that diversity as one of the overall goals of educational mentoring.

The First Step in Accepting Diversity

To begin the journey of exploring diversity, an educator might attempt to first understand his/her own world. Although unexpectedly so, this process could be quite difficult because the patterns for understanding the world are constantly shifting and changing. This phenomenon occurs in part because of living in an admittedly complex world. In a complex world, one is almost constantly assailed with data, facts, and evidence. Sometimes, this information saturation can be overwhelming. Nonetheless, through it all there remains the prevailing argument that one can handle these issues within frameworks through which humans have their being/understanding. Recently however, technological advances along with the widespread access

to the Internet have contributed to creating an even more advanced and potentially confusing reality. It appears that the complex world is morphing into something beyond --- a supercomplex world (Barnett, 2000).

This supercomplex world is a place in which the very frameworks by which one orients the self to the world are themselves contested. The very idea of supercomplexity denotes the very fragile reality brought about by social and technological change. It is a fragility in the way(s) one understands the self and in the way(s) in which individuals feel secure about acting in the world. The ability to exist within such supercomplexity requires both the knowledge of and the acceptance of diversity. Many believe that this issue of diversity should, ideally, become a part of the public school curriculum and its assessment (Barnett, 2000). Admittedly, the idea of supercomplexity will broaden the conceptual expectations of the educator within the school setting. Yet, nothing is new there, either. The idea that teaching is something beyond relaying mere knowledge has been advocated prior to this century. Could mentoring be the teacher's tool to help alleviate the stress of understanding the self within the context of the larger society?

An example of education involving something more than the mere relaying of units of knowledge can be demonstrated in the work of John Wilson. His writings addressed the idea of the psychological complexities of teaching. In his 1979 work, Fantasy and Common Sense in Education, he attempts to define "fantasy" and its role in education. Basically, according to Wilson, fantasy represents a certain kind of psychic impediment to the proper direction of education that can lead to a condition that he sometimes refers to as "autism". Although I have by no means given an exhaustive analysis of the diversity that exists in questioning the views of the function(s)/purpose(s) of education, Wilson and others like him make evident the simple fact that teaching might involve much more than merely relaying facts (Carr, 2000). Whether or not a researcher adopts Wilson's exact premises, he/she must admit that it is yet to be determined how ideas like this and others will ultimately play out in the next millennium during the heated debates on ethics and

diversity. This author strongly suspects that the ramifications for public education could be chaotic if proposed changes are approached with no guiding structure (Jackson, 2000).

Ethical Considerations

So, social scientists and educators interested in understanding and teaching ethnic diversity face an incredibly arduous task. Ethnic group members differ in the degree to which they have joined the majority/mainstream. Increasing numbers of individuals from mixed ethnic backgrounds cannot be assigned to a single group. The lines are becoming blurred. The precise delineation of specific American ethnic groups is almost impossible (Phinney, 1996). Not only are exact lines of diversity difficult to label, but it is very hard to establish the ethical lines to guide their consideration. Ethics, however, plays no small part in thinking about the role of diversity in schools.

This dualism occurs because the ethic pedagogy is concerned with how moral reasoning is taught in the classroom. Classical moral philosophy along with discussions of Kohlberg's moral reasoning frequently serve as a basis for initial ethical discussions. Sometimes, the works of Ferre and Gilligan insert additional fuel by adding other perspectives to the debates (Tucker & Stout, 1999). Even hotter topics/ideas must be confronted when religion and law are thrown into the mix of how diversity should work into the broader, social landscape of the Western world. Also, any casual observer has to wonder about the part personal, vested interest plays in the interpretation of the overall picture. One culture's ethics and the mainstream American ethic may not be the same. Obviously, the deliberation is difficult. To begin analysis, the observer might first consider what is currently being taught in secondary education classrooms around the nation.

A Brief Overview of Current Practices

At this time in history, secondary education teachers are being constantly challenged to search for even more effective ways to meet the needs posed by increased numbers of culturally diverse students. Increasing numbers of Hispanic, African American, and other students are filling the public school

classrooms. Some researchers believe that teachers of these students may need to know more about the contributions of non-mainstream groups and non-Western cultures. However, the purposeful nature of this knowledge acquisition may be difficult to sell when some educators might not even have an adequate conceptualization/understanding of what constitutes Western cultural backgrounds and influences. Afterall, America is called the melting pot of the world for a historical reason. Additionally, in order to tap the complexities of diversity, the teacher must first believe that difference does not equal deficit (Stodolsky & Grossman, 2000). This concept of allowing difference may be hard to convince teachers to accept because it requires the teacher to go against his/her basic human nature. Most people (educators are people, too) do what they do because they feel it is best

Some progressive educators are recommending the enhancement of the individual teachers' knowledge and appreciation of cultural differences in order to include multicultural materials and to use cultural forms familiar to students in school (Stodolsky & Grossman, 2000). Others fear that accommodating other cultures may merely deflect attention from other issues and maybe even weaken the braces of an already deteriorating social framework (Carr, 2000).

Many secondary education instructors already use literature as one practical, available avenue for promoting an awareness of diversity within the public school setting. In one particular study, a university professor and a group of graduate students worked to develop a literary program for elementary teachers in a large urban district of the southwestern United States. Their research was designed to validate the use of a developed model. That model was basically student-centered and constructivist. After about a week of research, it became clear to the researcher(s) the majority of the instruction occurring in the urban schools was unlike the model. The researchers struggled to see beyond the contrast to figure out what was really happening within the context (Anonymous, 2000).

This example was indicative of diversity issues emerging during real life implementation of educational research. In this particular instance, stark contrasts emerged between what a particular set of

collegiate researchers thought should happen in the secondary school setting, what was actually occurring, and the accompanying interpretation(s) of the event. The identifying the factor(s) that may have caused this contrast in perspective between researcher expectations and secondary school setting realities may be among the most powerful of tools that a secondary educator could obtain in the upcoming century. Interestingly though, specifically identifying those allusive factors has not been the focus of most of the secondary education research in the past century. It appears that researchers have focused on developing theory and testing their individual beliefs/ideas through the lens of their own preferred research methods. What has remained lacking in some public educational settings is information about how public school book knowledge ties into the broader, conceptual picture of American society and, still further, world societies (Jackson, 2000).

Other educators are working the problem of diversity from a different angle and they are not always willing to work within the existing establishment to promote diversity awareness. Many of these researchers recommend changing teaching to adapt to changing student needs. The Stodolsky and Grossman study revealed that the teachers in their study changed instruction to suit emergent student needs. These teachers made changes in how they organized and instructed their classes. English teachers reported using small groups, dramatic skits, and art to engage students in literature. One math teacher said that she considered her subject matter sequential and that the topic coverage had to be in a set order. She resisted a change in instructional practices to suit the new students. However, she did change the pacing for some classes/students and did work for mastery of the mathematics concepts. The authors of this study recommended that the math teachers be given information to alter instructional practices (2000). From this and the previous example, it is obvious that different educators choose varied ways to reach members of non-mainstream groups within the public school setting.

An Invitation to Research

At the present moment, most existing research on mentoring explores its comparative value when implemented from the traditional top down perspective. As an example of this, most mentors are seen as experienced, knowledgeable people who are wise enough to impart information to those who do not know as much without damaging the mentee's ego during the process. The mentee is shown the proverbial tricks of the trade and, thereby, gains the skills necessary to become a competent worker. This mentoring process has been used quite effectively in the business community. Its typical use appears designed to enable the less experienced individual to acquire the necessary information to be successful in a new position/level. Recent educational research, however, has broadened the traditional conceptual paradigm of mentoring, and, consequently, new questions have emerged for the researcher's exploration. How will educators use the mentoring condition that emerges when the mentee is actually performing the mentor role of the supposed mentor? Can that condition be called menteeing? Is mentoring the tool to guide a student to self-understanding and, afterward, enable the individual to see himself/herself within the context of a larger social reality?

Admittedly, the issues facing American educators handling diversity within the next century will be incredibly challenging. Sometimes, handling issues of diversity can cause acculturative stress (Lee, 1995). Facing diversity issues might first require the teacher to first face his/her own world perspective first. This tough task might require this viewer to figure out his/her own perspective and exactly what he/she is defending within his/her own perspective. This may not be comfortable to the individual. However, one might suspect that until that self-observation and exploration is complete, one is not truly free to see through the other's (the different other's) eyes without feeling defensiveness. Perhaps, this understanding of self within context of a larger reality is the direction the research on diversity needs to take (Jackson, 2000). Educational research of this nature could help to create bridges of understanding among people of all cultures and nationalities.

The prospect of opposites while conceptualizing diversity could prove to be quite unsettling to the secondary school educator upon initial perusal because the diversity of the new millennium may change the mind itself, transforming what human beings see and interpret as best. Along the journey of this new discovery one must never forget that personal lives are interconnected with and are inseparable from the social construct of what is. Obviously, change and the inclusion of ideas about diversity will not occur in a linear, unchallenged fashion. Conflicts will, necessarily, emerge (Anonymous, 2000). Additionally, as a word of discretion to anyone who studies diversity, one must never forget that the complex issue of diversity involves more than just the personal views held by any one particular viewer. This advice includes the writer of this paper. It includes the reader, too.

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Organization/Address: Harris County High School 504 E. 4th Street West Point, GA 31833	Telephone: (706) 645-5664	FAX:
	E-Mail Address: valeryjackson@charter.net	Date: 06/06/02

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